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ABSTRACT

Two presentations are provided from Innovative Session 2 of the Academy of Human Resource Development (HRD) 2000 Conference proceedings. "Training Companies Speak Out on HRD Industry Changes: Symposium Introduction" (R. Wayne Pace) describes how this symposium explores the process of consolidation in the field, how the Internet is being used to deliver training, and the effect of computers on the facilitation of simulations. "The Working Knowledge Paradigm" (Judyth S. Peterson) focuses on how advancing Internet technology has opened previously unimaginable opportunities to streamline the corporate training process and HRD professionals' responsibility to identify and/or develop new instructionally sound methodologies that will allow businesses to meet all their training needs at a fraction of the cost and time previously required to address only a small portion of their employees' training requirements. It describes QuicKnowledge.com's Working Knowledge Paradigm, which is uniquely designed to meet the current business imperatives for managers to have access to broad and practical information that is immediately applicable, relevant, and supportive of optimal productivity and job performance. (YLB)

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Innovative Session 2

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Training Companies Speak Out on HRD Industry Changes: Symposium Introduction

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Sweeping changes are occurring in both the way in which the human resource development field is structuring itself and the manner in which new electronic media are being used to deliver training to organizations. This symposium explores the process of consolidation in the field, how the internet is being used to deliver training, and the effect of computers on the facilitation of simulations.

Keywords: Consolidation, Internet, Simulation

In a recent article in Business Week (Grover, 1999), reviewing some of the difficulties involved in the merger between Franklin Quest and the Covey Leadership Center, Stephen Covey was quoted as saying that "It is much different when you go through it than when you look at it from some academic ivory tower" (p.49). Many similar experiences have taught scholars the serious difference between theory and practice. In fact practitioners often have many things to teach scholars, if we give an attentive nod to what they are doing. The academic community, as the AHRD tries to demonstrate on a continuing basis, can also provide valuable insights for even the very best practitioners. This symposium was organized to expose scholars to some changes occurring in the business of HRD and introduce a couple of innovations in delivery mechanisms.

In the business arena, the field of human resource development is making a number of rapid changes in the way in which the industry is being structured and in ways in which services are being delivered. Structural innovativeness is illustrated by the creation of alliances or partnerships (Limerick and Cunnington, 1993, pp. 98-101) among companies that were heretofore independent entrepreneurs. These mega-companies are designed to provide "one-stop" shopping for human resource development needs. Where the Ford Motor Company, for example, may have dealt with 2,500 different companies providing training services, in the future it may contract with a single conglomerate.

Dr. Brent D. Peterson, vice president of the Franklin Covey corporation and director of their Center for Research & Assessment, has been involved directly in some of the consolidation activities occurring in the field of human resource development. He describes some of the trends that are taking place and forecasts some of the consequences.

When Bill Gates was asked (Novak, 1999) how to make contemporary companies more effective, we were not surprised that he listed twelve ways to make digital information flow an intrinsic part of a company. Gates explained that digital electronic systems may "disintermediate" you by creating ways in which "buyers and sellers can easily find one another without taking much time or spending much money." To illustrate how changes occur, Gates cited the case of Egghead, a retail software chain, that, after struggling for several years, closed all of its physical stores nationwide in 1998 and set up shop exclusively on the Internet as Egghead.com.

Judy Peterson is vice president, product development, for QuicKnowledge.com, an innovative company that provides training over the Internet. She has been involved directly in the establishment and development of all aspects of QuicKnowledge.com and explains the "working knowledge" paradigmatic base used in formulating QuicKnowledge products, training course configurations, and an evaluation model. QuicKnowledge.com is rapidly becoming the site of preference for solving training needs.

More than ten years ago, Keiser and Seeler (Craig, 1987) noted that "as computer technology has become more sophisticated, it has become more reliable and simpler to use. Game and simulation design can make better use of the technology rather than be governed by it. Expert systems— software programs which can act as a consultant to the learner— have the potential of playing a major role in the future" (pp. 458-459). Their prediction has come into full fruition with the customization of simulations for individual companies and individual managers. Technology has enabled designers to condense time and deliver results immediately.

Rachel Bello, C.Paige Hinkson, and Tracy Lotz, with Executive Perspectives of Brookline, Massachusetts, comprise a team involved with an Employee Retention computer-based simulation that helps managers develop

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skills needed to retain employees, even when more lucrative opportunities present themselves. They explain the theoretical base of the simulation and demonstrate its innovative features.

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The Working Knowledge Paradigm

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Advancing Internet technology has opened previously unimaginable opportunities to streamline the corporate training process. Human Resource Development professionals have a responsibility to identify and/or develop new instructionally sound methodologies that will for the first time in history allow businesses to meet all their training needs at a fraction of the cost and the time previously required to address only a small portion of their employees' training requirements.

Keywords: Technology, Instruction, Methods

Corporate training in the United States is a multi-billion dollar investment. Leadership and professional development account for a significant portion of that expenditure. While most companies intuitively know that training in these skills is an investment in their own future, neither corporate managers nor the training community have been able to reliably track and confirm a return on their training dollars in any areas, especially the "soft skills".

The existing approach to training is not responsive to today's training needs. High costs, lengthy training time and a lack of availability prevent the vast majority of people, both at work and at home, from receiving much needed basic soft skills training.

As Internet technology has opened opportunities for less expensive and more convenient soft skills training, industry professionals are eager to take advantage of its universality. This has led the training community to attempt to develop new instructional products that capitalize on the Internet's exciting possibilities. However, for the most part these training courses seek to replicate the typical classroom experience, substituting technical features for instructor interactions and group involvement. This creates a problem for the soft skills instructional designer who must now keep the trainee's interest at the computer for extended periods of time, thus suggesting the need for extensive multimedia and frequent interactions to relieve boredom and maintain attention.

While using the Internet to deliver these programs allows some potential improvements, it does not define a new approach to learning that responds to the needs of today's fast-paced business environment. It merely replaces some of the old technology— classroom instruction that is not individualized and may not be particularly interesting— with media bells and whistles that are required to coax trainees to engage in the material for extended periods of time.

QuicKnowledge.com's Working Knowledge Paradigm is uniquely designed to meet the current business imperatives for managers to have access to broad and practical information that is immediately applicable, relevant and supportive of optimal productivity and job performance. Focusing on the Working Knowledge level of competency provides the opportunity to give employees concentrated, substantive, relevant content that by its nature is engaging and meaningful.

The Working Knowledge Paradigm

What is the Working Knowledge Paradigm? A readily usable understanding of a given skill that permits immediate practical application by producing an intermediate level of competence based on the 80/20 rule. The learning model is based on these assumptions:

1. Acquisition of information/knowledge empowers individuals to try new and potentially more effective behaviors.
2. Best practices exist for the most common and basic business issues and challenges.
3. Adults learn best when they assume responsibility for their own learning objectives and experiences.
4. For most employees, a "working level" of competence is sufficient for a majority of their job responsibilities.
5. In order for new skills to be assimilated and retained, they need to be presented to the learner when they are perceived as relevant and immediately applicable.

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6. The use of specific and effective methodologies can compensate for a lack of natural leadership abilities in many skill areas.

These assumptions form the basis of the Working Knowledge Premise: Most business people would prefer to have at least a basic, simplified understanding of how to consistently and effectively carry out the wide array of business functions that affect their daily performance, than to rely exclusively on unstructured input from their own business surroundings.

Consistent with these assumptions, QuicKnowledge.com has developed a training model that expedites delivery of useful tools, techniques and strategies to develop competence in basic business issues. It provides an opportunity for the participant to define their own learning objectives, test understanding with immediate feedback, and apply newly acquired information to real-life situations. In addition, job aids and worksheets are provided for continuous reinforcement during actual job performance.

Learning Principles

Working Knowledge modules conform to state-of-the-art multi-media instructional design principles. They generate high interest and retention by engaging the learner through generous use of humor and multi-sensory/modal stimulation. The individualized approach includes self-selection of topics, self-pacing, and a level of detail determined by personal choice, all of which have been found to encourage and support knowledge acquisition and comprehension.

The learning model provides for consistent presentations and methodologies, best-practices content, periodic reinforcement, individualized assessment and feedback, and application exercises for a working level of competence.

Current Training Methods

Traditional business training programs seek to provide the maximum amount of information available on a subject, with the goal that all the knowledge gained will be applicable at some time in the future as one's experience expands. Eventually, by retaining all the knowledge that was initially imparted through the training process, and gradually assimilating it into future experiences, the trainee hopefully achieves a high measure of expertise in any given subject. By multiplying the impact over and over again by the number of employees in an organization, productivity is expected to climb dramatically over time. Unfortunately, these desired end results are rarely achieved.

There are approximately 20 different instructional methods employed by the training industry in presenting training material. Of these, the most frequently used is classroom programs, which was employed as part of the training curriculum by over 90% of major corporations in 1998. Workbooks and manuals are the next most-used method, at 74%. Other common methods include videotapes, CD-ROM, Internet, overhead transparencies and audiocassettes. Typically, some combination of methods is employed, and the methods of choice are most often a function of the presenter's experience, the size of the group being trained, and the available budget for out-of-pocket expenses. Primary issues such as content, retention rate and total cost of training are frequently not given strong consideration in selecting the presentation method.

The average classroom training session consists of an offsite presentation to a large group of recipients usually requiring 8 to 24 classroom hours of attendance. This is generally at a cost of $100-500 per person per day, plus travel expenses and per diem, but without regard to the cost of lost work time. A live trainer provides guidance through written materials, experiential exercises, discussion, video or live demonstrations, artificial role-plays, and case study type applications. Timeliness, specific information, pace, individual needs, readiness, relevance, etc., may vary from person to person and session to session. More recently, computer-based training (CBT) has gained some limited acceptance in lieu of classrooms as a presentation medium. However, with the exception of CBT software tutorials, the CBT model is still based on the same conventional content, focus, depth and length of training that has been used for traditional training methods in the past.

Today's typical training activity attempts to maximize the level of expertise to the trai nee by presenting in-depth material on both core and peripheral issues. In the process, considerable time is allocated to background and supporting material that has only secondary benefit and documentation is often extensive and difficult to access

after the fact. Despite the level of detail provided and the amount of time spent on a given subject, results as measured by performance improvement are typically found to be quite low whenever there is an attempt to measure them.

Based on training survey results by Training Magazine computer-based training was employed by an average of 54% of major companies for 1998. With the emergence of personal computers, the Internet and CD ROM capabilities, computer based training has recently been termed web-based training (WBT), and has become a much more accessible presentation method. For instance, WBT is now available to virtually every individual entrepreneur and all technology-based firms, both small and large, by virtue of the computer hardware/software infrastructure that prevails in these business settings.

Business Training Needs

Resource constraints place major limits on the number of people who can receive formal training, as well as on the number of topics those people can be trained in. Consider this: there is a wide array of subjects that affect the daily performance of business people, ranging from such issues as time management to conducting meetings; from leadership methods to team building; from reading balance sheets to managing projects; and the list goes on and on. Yet from companies with more than 100 employees in the U.S., *less than 50%* of the business managers received *any* structured training in 1997. What is most disturbing is that on average, they received this training for a little more than one subject per person. According to Training Magazine's 1998 Annual Industry Report on Training, U.S. organizations with more than 100 employees trained approximately 58 million employees for an average of 32 hours in the past year. Although this is an impressive number at first glance, it averages little more than one subject per employee, despite the Report citing almost 50 key subjects as being important. It also leaves an estimated 50 million employees who received no formal training at all. Add to this the belief that global training deficiencies are assumed to be even much more dramatic than those of the U.S.

It is very probable that the amount of structured training received by personnel from companies with less than 100 employees was substantially less than for these larger companies. The conclusion: while there are more than a hundred million people in the U.S. alone needing business training, and the number of separate issues they need training on easily amounts to dozens of subjects each, only a meager fraction of the required training is taking place. Meanwhile, the great majority of today's managers, executives and entrepreneurs struggle without specific guidance on key issues affecting their performance.

Despite these criticisms and open questions about effectiveness, the training market continues to grow, and both large companies and individual entrepreneurs clamor for some way to keep abreast of the effects of downsizing, increased technology and the never-ending drive for productivity improvement. At the same time, training budgets are not keeping pace with these demands. This is giving rise to a search by many large and small organizations into innovative and effective new training methods that are lower in cost, simpler to administer, easier to evaluate, and less time demanding.

Working Knowledge Training Course Configuration

The Working Knowledge emphasis, by definition, is on presenting an immediate, useable working knowledge of a given subject. This is done by focusing on the several primary factors that have the most influence on understanding the subject, while also providing supplemental information on a small number of supporting, but complimentary factors. Non-essential material is not covered in the core training session; however, additional information and references guide the trainee on where to obtain comprehensive coverage of the subject, should that be desired.

A summary description of each module is contained on the web site, and is accessible to the potential trainee prior to selecting the course. The complete training module itself consists of the following components:

- Definitions of main terms;
- Extensive navigation capability that allows rapid movement to any point in the training presentation;
- Interactive training session with state-of-the-art graphics, interactivity, animation and extended content linking;
- Printouts of summary notes, forms and/or other supporting material; and

- References on sources that provide in-depth information or training (e.g., Custom consulting, extended seminars, books, etc.).

An online "Managers' Chat Room" and a "Message Board" are also being developed and tested to determine their effectiveness in providing customers with networking and support in applying the working knowledge strategies.

Performance Support

Unlike conventional training activities, whether traditional or online, one of the Working Knowledge Paradigm's primary objectives is performance support. Performance support consists of the application of proactive tools and aids to effectively implement the training. The following performance support activities are an integral part of the training solution.

1. Continuous access to all online material throughout the annual contract period for ongoing reinforcement
2. A process for rapid feedback on questions regarding implementation of any given skill
3. Consultation on methods for integrating soft skills performance support into such business programs as 360 degree feedback and leadership development
4. Coaching tools for both trainers and supervisors on how to apply or improve a given skill within a business setting
5. Unlimited access to all skill subjects, including new releases
6. Access to online material both at work and at home
7. Comprehensive reporting and tracking of the training that has been completed
8. Access by both the customers and their families to subjects covering not only business issues, but also non-business issues like personal development, family relations and parenting that are related to each other and to overall personal effectiveness, either directly or indirectly

Cultural Factors

The Working Knowledge Paradigm is the right idea for the right time. In the Information Age human beings, particularly in the industrialized world, are continually bombarded by an excess of information, consistently causing information overload. This is especially true in the business world, where managers and employees must sift through reams of information to glean that which is relevant and significant. This training model cuts right to those basic elements that provide focus and substance for improving job performance.

There has been a significant change in the employer-employee relationship. Companies no longer provide job security, and employees do not pledge their loyalty. Today's managers are more concerned with their own personal/ professional development than with their continued career path in any given organization. This has created a significant change in the way employers train their employees and in the expectations that employees have for professional development opportunities. Employers are reluctant to invest heavily in employees that may easily leave for a "better offer"; employees seek to develop broad competence and development to prepare for that "better offer".

The result of these cultural factors is a general condition in which intelligent, motivated, relatively sophisticated and upwardly aspiring individuals must take responsibility for their own development. The Working Knowledge Paradigm satisfies the culturally developed expectations of this group.

The Enterprise View

Resources are limited in today's dynamic and cost-conscious environment, and although enlightened organizations affirm that people are their most valuable asset, reality places limits on how much can be invested in the "people side" of the business and still maintain a competitive position. The Working Knowledge training model will allow a company to provide more opportunities for more people to develop critical skill areas without a significant financial

investment. Follow-up and evaluation of the model's effectiveness will take place in performance planning and evaluation sessions, as job holders are asked to apply the best practices that have been presented in the training.

The responsibility for improved job performance as well as for career development can be appropriately placed on the individual employee, since the investment is minimal and the material easily accessible. In addition, the modules can be used to supplement the traditional formal training that already exists in the enterprise, again enhancing organizational productivity without a major investment in time or money.

Traditional Approach to Training Evaluation

Human relations, communications, leadership, many business skills— these are called "soft skills." They are called "soft" because they don't lend themselves easily to quantifiable data. The accuracy or defect rate of a product can be measure with an instrument or counted. There is a "right" and a "wrong" way to assemble a part. Data can easily be collected and tracked in technical skill areas. There is a much more direct connection between what an employee knows and how he or she performs a task.

Soft skills can be measured, also, but not so easily. We tend to know more about soft skills than what we apply in our daily lives. For example, most of us know what we should do to be a "good" listener, we could certainly identify or pick our the behaviors that we should exhibit when listening, but few of us use those skills consistently. Paper-and-pencil tests that attempt to assess knowledge acquisition are therefore relatively meaningless in predicting how an individual will actually perform a skill in a real setting. Some training programs include "role plays" in their methodology, but the situations are artificial and the results are usually not documented or reported, anyway.

The only meaningful evaluation of training, and especially soft skills training, comes from determining whether or not the employee is using the skills on the job. To do this, someone has to be there to observe performance and give feedback. While this is perhaps an oversimplification, the most simple way of assessment— a test— is meaningless, and the only really useful way of assessment— performance— is cumbersome and time consuming. The result of this dilemma is the traditional methodology for evaluating soft skills: none.

Working Knowledge Evaluation Model

Companies and the training community know that training has value only as it translates to improved performance. Together they have spent years trying to assess return on the training investment. A number of assessment models exist which are effective. Since these models already exist, what's the problem? Why can't we routinely and accurately evaluate and report the return from the thousands of dollars that are spent on training in the "soft skills"?

The Working Knowledge Paradigm includes a new approach to evaluation, ultimately based on individual accountability for results. This approach focuses on the quality, relevance, and soundness of the material itself and promotes real-world feedback regarding its application in the workplace. The content of the modules will convey the best current thinking and tried-and-true wisdom in presentations that use humor, style, and state-of-the-art technology and methodologies to maintain the customer's interest, provide interactivity, and enhance retention.

However, the customer will assume the personal responsibility to gather feedback from others regarding improved job performance. Appropriate worksheets, assessment forms, and methodologies will be provided to the customer to use in assessing personal performance and monitoring progress.

1. Best practices content (validated through current literature and research);
2. Entertaining and relevant presentation of content (validated by customer feedback);
3. Real-world assessment of improved job performance according to the customer's objectives (validated through customer self-reports and customer surveys online).

Suggested Methodology for Training Evaluation

The trainee and his or her direct supervisor need to answer these questions in a mutual discussion:

1. Does the trainee use the job aids, and how well?
2. What feedback does the trainee get when he or she uses the Performance Feedback document?
3. How well does the trainee use the Performance Feedback document to continually improve performance?
4. On an organizational level, what are the organizational indicators tied to effective performance of this skill?
5. How do those indicators reflect improved performance by people who have completed the training?

The organizational manager and the trainee must take a collaborative approach in answering these questions, and plan whatever reinforcement or coaching is necessary to develop and maintain skill in this area. The Performance Feedback Self-assessment can be used for this evaluation, or other tools can be developed for management planning, follow-up and coaching as the need arises.

Evaluation of training activities is an area of significant controversy for conventional business training programs. The effectiveness of training under the Working Knowledge Paradigm is ultimately based on individual accountability. The customer assumes the personal responsibility to gather feedback from others regarding improved performance in, say, the workplace, while appropriate worksheets, assessment forms, and methodologies are provided to the customer to use in measuring personal performance and monitoring progress.

The Working Knowledge Paradigm is centered on providing training that is immediately useful. The learning goal is successful practical application, not scoring well on a test. To support organizations in assuring transfer of training to the work environment, a Manager's Checklist is included for each module to assist the trainee's immediate supervisor in establishing performance goals before the training and in coaching and assessing performance after the training. In this model, training effectiveness is evaluated where it can and should be done: by the trainee and his or her supervisor. The Working Knowledge principle suggests that training effectiveness evaluation is best and most accurately done by those closest to the job. With this collaborative effort, organizations will see a meaningful return on their training investment.

Training Effectiveness Features

Working Knowledge modules provide focused learning that can be organized according to the customer's learning style and personal needs. They are permitted to access the material according to their own judgment and motivations. Whatever their style or approach, they are given significant support in applying the skills and concepts of the module.

- Effectiveness Indicators to help them focus on the RESULTS that can be achieved in applying the skills
- Application Aids— job aids, worksheets, checklists, reference guides— that enable them to take every action and apply every principle that has been presented in the module
- A Performance Feedback Document (Self-assessment) to allow them to assess their own performance, distribute to others to get performance feedback or to help set performance goals

Conclusion

QuicKnowledge.com's Working Knowledge Paradigm is uniquely designed to meet the challenges of the Information Age, the needs of today's labor, management and executive force in the business world, and individuals and family groups in private life. Fast-paced life and rapidly changing requirements demand that people now be knowledgeable in a wide range of subjects, and that essential information be readily accessible to them when, where, and how it is needed. In a time when personal energy as well as organizational resources are limited and yet more critical than ever, this new paradigm allows people to spend less time acquiring knowledge and more time applying it.